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# Autumn Hall's development sensitive to nature, public

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Raiford Trask III looked out across Autumn Hall Lake, shimmering in the morning sun on Monday.

"I used to spend a lot of time there when I was a kid," he said, a little wistfully. It's been a long time since he has fished there.

The 8-acre lake is an important feature of Autumn Hall, a mixed-use development going up on Eastwood Road. It's still surrounded by pine trees, but the sounds of construction are getting closer.

It's inevitable that trees will fall for a development of some 500 residential units, but Trask and his team have been working to preserve as many trees on the 236-acre site as possible.

That's one of the reasons Trask won the 2008 Marvin Collins Distinguished Leadership Award in the Citizen Planner category, presented by the N.C. Chapter of the American Planning Association.

Wilmington's Development Services division wrote the nomination at the request of Margee Herring, a publicist, said Kaye Graybeal, the city's director of development services.

She said Trask deserved the award for his efforts to work around mature trees and vegetation, for his willingness to make Autumn Hall's amenities such as parks and walkways available to the public, and for cooperating with the city and the state

Department of Transportation on routing the multiuse path near Eastwood Road.

She said the developers allowed the path to meander through parts of Autumn Hall



Photo | Jason A. Frizzelle  
Developer Raiford Trask III stands in the Autumn Hall subdivision's Arbor Park in Wilmington.

property, making it easier to build it around trees. They even footed the bill for extra costs of running it across their land.

She said the developers also put a lot of effort into pedestrian connections. She said some of the "out parcels" - restaurants and stores not attached to the main buildings of a mall - are connected via landscaped walking paths through parking lots, rather than making people cross hot pavement. She also congratulated the developers for using narrow, curving streets, which calms traffic.

Trask said one reason for that is to discourage cut-through traffic in Autumn Hall and surrounding streets.

I don't know how much of this will appease the development's former opponents. The City Council meeting of Feb. 1, 2005, when City Council approved rezoning the former Duck Haven golf course, was the most crowded council meeting I ever saw.

Hundreds of people came downtown to oppose what the Star-News described then as a "mini-Mayfaire," a planned development combining office and retail space with residential units.

Trask said the public reaction isn't what spurred him to create a pedestrian-friendly, green development. He said he'd always envisioned it that way.

The Trask family has owned the land since the 1950s, he said. The family donated much of the land that now accommodates the University of North Carolina Wilmington, and developed the College Acres neighborhood near it. In fact, Autumn Hall Lake fills the hole left when sand was removed for College Acres.

There's a large outdoor fireplace in Autumn Hall's Arbor Park, and a plaque says Est. 1966. That's when Trask's grandfather, Raiford Trask, built the house called Autumn Hall near the lake.

His parents lived at nearby Wrightsville Beach. Trask, 46, grew up playing in the woods near that lake and the headwaters of Bradley Creek.

Raiford III developed the Renaissance shopping center across Military Cutoff Road from Mayfaire. Autumn Hall is his first residential development.

He said it costs more to build around trees than to level them and build over them, but that's what today's buyers want.

Autumn Hall is designed to encourage people to walk, including neighbors who might stroll in from surrounding streets to shop or enjoy the parks.

All of the vegetation is indigenous to the area: pines instead of palms. An arborist is helping with the design. Many of the trees that were in the footprint of buildings have been relocated within the development.

A fountain was originally planned for one traffic roundabout we saw. Instead, the original live oaks were left there among landscaped shrubbery.

He wants Autumn Hall to be environmentally authentic and architecturally authentic.

He said the team decided to forego the "Charleston coastal" look many developers opt for. Instead, architect Chris Boney helped come up with a "Cape Fear Heritage" style that incorporates beach and historic downtown elements.

The first phase includes 90 residential lots. Thirty were sold in the first 30 days they were offered. But that was largely to people who'd long planned to buy there. He can only hope that pace continues.

A health-care facility and a bank will be among the first commercial tenants. The team is working hard to fill other commercial buildings.

This current real estate slowdown comes at an inconvenient time, Trask acknowledged. But he said the 10- or 15-year development period was always likely to include an up cycle and a down cycle.

"I'd rather get the down cycle out of the way first," he said.

*Si Cantwell covers the people and places that make Southeastern North Carolina unique. He also writes our "site host" guide at HereNow.StarNewsOnline.com. Contact him at 343-2364 or Si.Cantwell@StarNewsOnline.com.*

